EDUCATION ISSUE

The Commonweal

April 22, 1949

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Slow-up in Italy

Leo J. Wollemborg

Education and Wisdom

George N. Shuster

VOLUME L

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NUMBER 2

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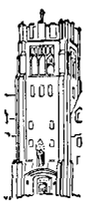

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The
COMMONWEAL

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Descent Into Hell—The Liturgical Year

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New Farm Program

THERE ARE GOOD reasons why farmers often find themselves economically at a disadvantage. Their production (unlike manufacturing, for instance) is highly susceptible to the vagaries of the weather and other natural hazards: droughts, storms, floods, insect pests, livestock and plant diseases. World market conditions are likewise difficult to control; wide fluctuations of scarcity and surplus inevitably cause farm commodity prices to gyrate violently. It is a matter of record that sharp declines in buying power on the part of the sixth of the country engaged in agriculture have been heavy contributing factors to national depressions. And it is obviously in the public interest that the capital which the soil of the United States represents should be preserved and increased.

For these and other reasons the American farmer is entitled to a special status and to special benefits—in the national interest. Therefore, too, soil conservation practices rightly go hand in hand with benefit payments.

To promote these special benefits, the administration has brought out a radical new farm program, which purports to meet changing conditions.

If tone itself could do it, many citizens were reassured by the brief, unimpassioned broadcast on the Administration's new farm proposals, April 11, by Representative Cooley and Secretary Brannan, who asserted that a period of economic transition logically calls for new tactics. The outside world was getting on its feet and no longer needed American farm surpluses; the resultant lower income in our rural areas was a threat to national prosperity. Moreover, Mr. Brannan declared, he needed no new powers to set up the plans proposed. He even thought (if he failed to demonstrate) that the new program would not cost much more than the present one. The proposed new subsidies would enable the domestic consumer of milk products, eggs and meat to buy these perishables for so much less that farmers would shift sufficiently from wheat, cotton and other surplus crop production.

The novel feature of the new scheme is the abandonment of current price supports on perishable commodities, which comprise three-fourths of the nation's farm production. Their prices would be allowed to find their "natural" level in the old free way. Then, up to an annual gross income figure of $25,000 per farmer, the Government would pay in cash the difference between what he received for his crops in the "free market" and the new "parity income" figure based on average income from the various crops for the previous ten years. This is the most controversial, as well as the most novel, feature of the impending program.

Certain good features thus far revealed by Mr. Brannan include the extension of the plan to more commodities than at present and the supplanting of "parity prices" by "parity income." Designation of *cash* income rather than over-all income as the parity basis, however, penalizes the family farmer who produces most of his own food and feed, and it puts a premium on one-crop farming.

The crux of the matter is how the new subsidy device for "perishables" would work. As is intimated elsewhere in these pages, federal expenditures are already at a danger point. It would be irresponsible to undertake so vast a program without very specific ideas as to the extent of the probable (and possible) costs. Besides, would not a large new bureaucracy be required to process and check each farmer's individual claims for cash each year? And what of the many new enforcement problems of soil conservation and planting and marketing controls?

So far official presentation of the proposed program leaves much to be desired. No doubt the scheme is necessarily complicated, but that does not mean that its outlines should remain so vague. Considerably more clarification is needed to justify the supplanting of present controls—and current provisions for further controls as needed—by a new system which inevitably hastens the country toward statism of an even more centralized sort. The determination of our wheat and other producers to make one last killing before flexible price supports go into effect in January will produce enormous surpluses. But these should

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not panic the American people into fastening on themselves a new incubus which, history amply demonstrates, will never relinquish but rather ever tightens its bureaucratic grip.

German Statutes and Status.

JUST AFTER the twelve-nation Atlantic Pact was signed in Washington, the French, English and United States Governments announced their agreement upon an "occupation statute" for Germany, which, a few days later, was published in Germany. After advising, recommending and suggesting for a number of years, the three western occupiers have at length announced what their own part in a recreated German state is to be for an indefinite time.

Ever since last September, sixty-five German delegates have been meeting in Bonn, on the Rhine, trying to draw up a constitution upon which to form the new German state of the three western zones of post-war Germany. Of these 65 delegates, 27 "represent" the Social Democratic party, and 27 "represent" the Christian Democratic parties, and 9 represent others. No agreement has been reached at Bonn upon paragraphs which the different German parties and the various French, English and American observers and mentors are willing to accept. Now the Germans know what the Allies will accept and will require. But the two big West German party groups are still at odds. Recently, the Social Democrat leaders have been conferring at nearby Bad Godesberg (the lovely town where Hitler received Chamberlain), and voicing a double, if temperately expressed, opposition. They oppose the Occupation Statute, as reserving so many and such crucial powers for the Allies that a real German state cannot be formed, and they think the document being toiled over down the river at Bonn should be called not a constitution, but an "administration statute." Secondly, the SP leaders still find themselves unable to accept the demands of the Christian Democrats, although the grounds of difference have shifted. They have found a compromise on the financial power of the projected central state (which the Socialists want to be greater in relation to the federalized units, the *Laender,* than do the Christian Democrats), but now they want to give the central government greater legislative power than the Christian Democrats do.

The new Occupation Statute appears at present to be most significant as a mark of the unity of France, England and the United States. The German situation is still left in a condition of "gradualness," with no sharp break from the immediate past, and no near prospect of radical change in the future. The idea—or actuality—of a West Germany formed out of the three allied zones, without the East, Soviet Zone, appears to be accepted by the parties at Bonn and by the Allies. The "seriousness" of the new West German State will be limited definitely by the powers reserved for England, France and US. It will also be limited internally by the contradiction between the amputating boundaries on the East and the long, historical pressure of United Reich ideas and development. The new state will start off as a relatively federal rather than centralized organization. The capacity of constitutions, laws and foreign governments to regulate the degree of federalism-centralism of a great country like Germany is, in the longer run, doubtful. From the very end of the war, the Germans have thought that a federal Germany is possible only in a federal Europe. The Western Powers have given Germany a wider opening for building up her economy and all her institutions. But, with the reserved powers, and the provisions for review of the situation in a year, there is still no clear decision on the question of how far you can trust the Germans—and the question of how you can get along without trusting the Germans.

Comics, Radio, Movies, Television

FROM A STRICT, logical viewpoint, it is doubtful if any genuinely new problem of right action fell from the sky when Hiroshima was vaporized. Morally, the atom bomb could be viewed as a supermonster "blockbuster"; and by 1945, we were old hands at blockbusters. Comics, radio, movies and television do not bring to children and their parents new and unheard-of problems of thought and word and deed. But they do seem to raise recognized trials of education to a new, rather breathless level. "Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 148: *Comics, Radio, Movies—and Children*" notes that "the emotional atmosphere that seems to surround this whole question will not help solve the very real problems that are raised, not so much by the comics as such, as by their quantity, their availability, and the abuses to which they have been subject."

The pamphlet which Josette Frank has prepared on this topic for the Public Affairs Committee is interesting. One thing in it which seems worth stressing is the overlap of the comic-radio-etc.-children problem and the comic-radio-etc.-adult problem. We refer not only to the fact that children tend to listen in on soap operas and horror programs which advertisers prepare for suckers of mature years; and to the fact that a big part of the market for gaudy comic books is over 21 years old. We doubt if a complaint on that score is legitimate. It's rather this: that too much radio, movies, comics, television is bad from any age angle; and the old people, over twenty, as well as the young, ought to get things in order and in proportion: "Help them develop critical

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standards. . . . Help them budget their time. . . . See that they have plenty of enjoyable things to do. . . ." Not just "them," we'd hope, but us.

The method of reform emphasized in this pamphlet seems, or feels, or faintly smells, somehow unreal or social servicey or do-good. Looking and listening together in patient little family groups is recommended; sharing experience, and then talking it all over in a creative, critical way. Fine, and we look to see a good, amusing strip made out of Robert's *Rules of Order* of parliamentary law.

In synthetic ways, "many children escape from the humdrum of ordinary living. Where in their daily routines will most of our children today find opportunities for adventure? Certainly not on city or even suburban streets, in communities hedged around with restrictions. Not in our shrinking homes, crowded and ill-planned for children. Not even in the routines of school and the supervised playground." Later on there is war and revolution, and the long list of maturer vices. Unless something is done.

Report on the Jubilee Fund

IN THE first six weeks of the 25th anniversary campaign THE COMMONWEAL has received 553 of the 2,000 twenty-five dollar Silver Jubilee units needed to continue publication—more than 27 percent. In this Education Issue it is heartening to note that 16 of these contributions have come from seminaries, colleges and academies, 16 from monasteries and convents, 60 from priests, 18 from bishops.

THE COMMONWEAL urges more readers to sustain the fine initial momentum by joining this campaign to save the magazine. Checks should be made payable to the *Commonweal Silver Jubilee Fund.*

The Cost of Atlantic Security

WITHIN FOUR DAYS after the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, the Benelux countries (Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg) together with Italy, Norway and Denmark had asked the United States for arms and money to put the Treaty into working order. Secretary Acheson replied that this Government would recommend the appeal to Congress. When he said this, he raised the questions that are now going round and round: what will it cost to arm Western Europe and how will we pay for it?

Prompting these questions right now, when Congress is approving over five billions for ERP and fifteen billions for national defense, was a tactical mistake, some say, by Mr. Acheson. Perhaps it was, but actually, raising the question now is the only honest way to face the implications of the North Atlantic Treaty. So far that Treaty is merely a piece of paper; the security it promises will cost money, it will involve risks as well as security, and a responsible Government cannot afford to hide expenses and risks from those who are going to pay for them.

No one knows yet how much it will cost to rearm Western Europe; estimates now run between one and two billion dollars for the first year. Dr. Edwin G. Nourse, Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers to the President, has come up with a suggestion. He believes that it would be wrong to add the cost of European arms to the present cost of national defense, since he thinks that going above fifteen billions is too dangerous. Instead, he proposes that since the Atlantic Treaty has changed the security outlook, we should allocate funds to Europe that formerly would have been spent domestically for national defense. His reasoning is this: under the Atlantic Treaty "we expect to buy better security at the same cost or even, in due time, at lower cost than would otherwise be required."

But President Truman dissents. He has said that the cost of European arms will have to be added to the present fifteen billions for national defense. He has taken this position before Dr. Nourse's plan, which has influential Congressmen considerably "interested" at this point, has been adequately explored." Mr. Truman may be stubbornly nostalgic, in an I-told-you-so mood, about the nearly five billions in taxes which the 80th Congress took away from him over his veto.

What Dr. Nourse has done is to bring up the fundamental matter of re-examining all national security costs in the light of the new security system. His suggestion is reasonable and by no means the carping objection of a narrow-minded economist; it deserves better attention from Congress than Mr. Truman's hasty brush-off. Whatever the costs, the economic fact remains that military preparedness is not our primary objective in Europe, even though it is urgently necessary to back up the Treaty with armed strength: the first objective in Europe is still economic recovery, made secure by a new power-group, the North Atlantic states.

As Dr. Nourse has said, this new power-grouping, in support of ERP, demands of us that "we rework the whole operational and financial plan so as to gain maximum security with minimum strain on our economy."

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Political Stagnation in Italy

Economic recovery still hampered one year after anti-Communist victory at the polls

Leo J. Wollemborg

A SHORT time ago, as the plane of a foreign airline was approaching an Italian airport, the hostess turned to the passengers and said: "You are about to land in the country that has won the war." After a few days' stay in Italy, the average tourist is usually inclined to agree.

In hotels and restaurants, he has found excellent food and service. Trains are running on time (even without Mussolini) and comfortable accommodations are available in first-class coaches and sleeping cars. Shops on the Via Condotti in Rome—and on the Via Manzoni in Milan and on their equivalents in the major Italian towns—display a lavish array of goods, which are tops in quality and taste.

You can have the most wonderful six-course dinner (wine included) for as little as $3.00—but it takes the average Italian worker two days to earn that much money. You can have a suit made to order from the best material for the equivalent of $70.00—but it would take the average white-collar worker a month's salary to pay for that suit.

Labor is still Italy's cheapest commodity—to the fortune of the few who have the money to hire labor and to the misfortune of the many who have only their labor to offer for hire.

★

AS A COUNTRY, Italy has always been very good for the rich, very bad for the poor.

Economic and political power has always been vested in very few hands: mostly landowners in the South, big business and industrialists in the North. A professional class of politicians (drawn mostly from the swollen ranks of the lawyers) provided a parliamentary veneer. The system was topped by the Monarchy and propped by the Army and by an evergrowing, persuasive bureaucracy. The Catholic Church, always very powerful in the country, had a working agreement with this paternalistic régime long before it officially recognized the Italian State in 1929.

Millions of peasants toiled in the fields, procreated and died, without taking any part in the country's political life. Emigration was the only chance to improve their dreary lot.

At the turn of the century, a socialist movement was born in the growing industrial towns of the North. In later years, this movement was to give birth to several political organizations of the Left and of the Extreme Left (including the Italian Communist Party); but its main body was to remain faithful to a moderate brand of Socialism, with a basically bourgeois leadership and a natural aversion to violence.

Came the First World War. Italy emerged a victorious but tired and embittered country. To the Italian people, it had been the last war of the "Risorgimento." To a small group of professional nationalists, it had been Italy's first war as a Great Power. The Peace settlement could only disappoint those dreamers of empires. They cleverly managed to turn their disappointment into a national calamity. Falling for this propaganda, too busy moaning over the "imperial" war they were supposed to have lost (and which they had never intended to fight in the first place), the Italians forgot to rejoice over the national war they had won.

This feeling of national frustration, the inevitable economic and social aftermath of a war and the dread aroused by the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, set the stage for fascism. In its rise to power, all but a few members of the Italian ruling class had their share of responsibility. Some gave direct support; many more unwittingly helped by failing to see the danger before it was too late. Mussolini's victory was gained over democracy much more than over communism. And what's even worse, it was a victory by default and desertion. The forces that should have stood for freedom, just were not there or turned up in the fascist camp. Mussolini "marched on Rome" in a sleeping car.

★

EVENTUALLY, fascism plunged the country into another World War. The people had no say in this decision; it aroused mixed feelings among the forces of wealth and tradition which had so powerfully helped fascism to power. These forces bided their time, until the moment came, after three years of war. On July 25, 1943, Mussolini was thrown overboard by the same king who had called him to the Premiership on October 28, 1922. Too late to save the country from

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war and foreign occupation, from destruction and misery. Too late to save the Monarchy itself.

June 2, 1946: first free elections in Italy since 1922. Italy becomes a Republic. Organized Catholicism steps into the political vacuum left by the disappearance of fascism and monarchy. The Christian-Democrats emerge as the strongest party of republican Italy—thanks to five million monarchist votes.

Outside of the extreme Left, only the Catholic Church could provide the basis and the organization for a mass party. As the trend in international affairs was mirrored in the Italian political alignment, the Christian-Democrats became more and more the rallying point for all anti-communist forces; at the same time, the cleavage within the Socialist Party became deeper and deeper, sapping the very foundations for a third force, between Communists and Christian-Democrats.

Actually, it was the Communist issue that brought about an open split in the Socialist ranks. Signor Nenni, leader of the Italian Socialist Party (P.S.I.), came out for closer ties with the Extreme Left. The majority supported him; a moderate minority, led by Signor Saragat, walked out. Encouraged by this split and by growing evidence of US interest in Italian political affairs, Signor De Gasperi "unloaded" the Leftists from his Cabinet. The Communists hit back, trying to unseat the new Government by a combination of strikes, propaganda and parliamentary maneuvers. The attempt failed and the decision was passed on to the general elections of April, 1948.

Early in the year, it appeared that the Communists' boasts of victory might prove correct and that the "People's Bloc" (Communists, Left-Wing Socialists and other pseudo-democratic outfits included mostly for camouflage purposes) would obtain a majority or at least a plurality of the votes. Two major factors reversed the trend in the last few weeks before election day: the intense anti-Communist campaign that the Catholic Church and its affiliated organizations ("Azione Cattolica" and the newly created "Civic Committees") carried into every parish and hamlet; and concrete evidence of the support that the United States was giving and was determined to continue to give to a democratic Italy.

The net result was a decisive defeat of the Communists at the polls. The scare had been strong enough to drive millions of Italians (who under normal circumstances would have voted either for some Rightist party or for some moderate left-of-center outfit) to cast their ballots for the Christian-Democrats, the only available alternative to Communism. Here lies the explanation for the over-sized victory gained by Signor De Gasperi's party—a victory quite out of proportion with the real strength of the party in the country and, as it turned out, far from an unmixed blessing for the country itself.

Up to that time, wariness, patience and a natural talent for delay and compromise—so outstandingly embodied in Premier De Gasperi—had served well the cause of the Christian-Democratic party and that of Italy herself.

★

DURING the slow months following the June '46 elections, it had been necessary to put first things first: build up the strength of the party, secure allies and generally concentrate on ensuring public order and free elections. Social and economic reforms, although long overdue, had to wait yet a little longer. The majority of the people understood. They gave their vote to the Christian-Democrats, trusting that, once victorious, the De Gasperi Government would make good its electoral promises: an effective land reform, a simplified and progressive taxation system and a thorough overhauling of the industrial set-up. American dollars would ease the task of raising the standard of living of the underprivileged without recourse to confiscatory measures against the propertied classes.

But a year has gone by since the '48 elections and time (and the Christian-Democratic "régime") has produced little more than blueprints and disappointment. The task, no doubt, is tremendous; and one cannot expect miracles overnight. However, the Christian-Democratic leadership cannot escape responsibility for the impressive lack of achievement that the record shows.

Good, honest, well-meaning conservatives, Signor De Gasperi and his closest collaborators have not displayed the vision and above all the boldness to face the issue squarely. The house urgently calls for basic alterations; but the landlord is afraid that the replacement of some rotten beam may cause the collapse of the whole structure. So he gets busy applying a coat of paint to the rusty front door, fixes a couple of leaking pipes, but postpones sending for the contractor hoping that somehow the old building will last another winter or two.

No wonder that many Italians—who voted Christian-Democratic last April—feel that once again they have been deceived in their expectations. No wonder that a large section of the Italian people—now just emerging from centuries of paternalistic régimes topped by twenty years of fascism—should be sinking back again into the morass of political indifference and cynicism. "It's still the same old story, the same old system working, when it works at all, to the advantage of the privileged few."

As time goes by, even friendly observers begin to wonder whether the quality of its leadership and its own swollen hugeness do not condemn this

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mammoth party to inertia. Certainly, stirrings from within have failed so far to reach its motor centers and proddings from without have not met with better luck.

In recent months, the "young Turks" who make up the Left Wing of the Christian-Democratic party have grown increasingly restive over the policy, or lack of policy, of the De Gasperi Government.

Those Christian-Democrats of the Left are not an organized group, but rather a motley and loose conglomeration. The outstanding personality is Signor Gronchi, a very intelligent and ambitious man, who has been secretary-general of the party and is now President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies. There are a few more well known members or former members of Parliament (Dossetti, Rapelli, Ravaioli), and there is a sizable number of younger people making up the so-called "Social Policy" movement.

★

MOST of those "progressive Catholics" look for inspiration to Don Luigi Sturzo, the little Sicilian priest who back in 1919 founded the Popular Party and who is still generally regarded as the Grand Old Man of Catholic Italy. In social and economic matters, their program does not materially differ from that of the moderate Socialists—except for the fact that their Bible is still the Bible and not *Das Kapital*. Their most direct bid for leadership—or at least for a larger share in running the Christian-Democratic Party and through it the Government—was made last November at the Pesaro meeting. It was a kind of get-together of the different groups of the Christian-Democratic Left, called by the "Social Policy" movement and with Signor Gronchi in the rôle of the keynoter. He clearly signified that "the reactionary capitalist and landowning class" was still able to exert too strong an influence over the De Gasperi Cabinet and sharply criticized the lack of positive and progressive action by the Government. However, Signor Gronchi made the mistake of coupling those pronouncements with strong reservations concerning Italy's adherence to a Western "bloc."

This turned out to be a singularly ill-timed move, since at that very moment the Vatican was coming out more openly in favor of Italy's alignment with the Western Powers. Consequently, even Gronchi's proposals in economic and social matters fell through, causing scarcely a ripple in the stagnant waters of the Christian-Democratic majority.

Within the Cabinet itself, a few Christian-Democrats have sought to stir up some action. Last Summer, Signor Fanfani, Minister of Labor, introduced a bill for the construction of low cost houses for workers, to be financed partly by the State and partly through compulsory contributions by both labor and management. To be sure, it was a very complicated plan and it immediately became an easy target for criticism from both the Right and the extreme Left. But the decisive element was the negative attitude of the Christian-Democratic majority. They turned a cold shoulder to the Fanfani Plan, while failing to produce a workable substitute. As a consequence, the Fanfani Plan has been kicked around in Parliament for several months. Only a few weeks ago, a bill has been approved which, except for the name, bears very little resemblance to the original proposal. It calls for the construction of about 225,000 housing units over a period of *seven* years. In the meantime, Italy is still short some 1½ million housing units: not only in Carlo Levi's lost country beyond Eboli, but in Rome itself thousands of people are still living in caves and grottoes.

A year ago, a special Commission headed by Minister of Finance Vanoni (another Christian-Democrat) was given the task of revising the taxation system. The present set-up, everyone agrees, is most cumbersome, unfair and generally unworkable; what's even worse, it actually puts a premium on deceit and tax delinquency. Experts say that an Italian taxpayer making a true declaration would be liable, under the 70-odd levies presently on the books, to pay a sum amounting to some 120% of his income. This may be an exaggeration, but the fact remains that in Italy, much more than anywhere else, the tax collecting procedure has developed into a battle of wits between taxpayers and collectors. The tax collectors are professionally convinced that no taxpayer *ever* makes a true declaration (and in most cases they are right). The taxpayers are convinced that the tax collector will raise, more or less arbitrarily, whatever figure is entered in their declaration (and they're often right).

★

A permanent solution to the problem is obviously a long range proposition involving nothing less than the development of a "fiscal conscience" in both taxpayers and tax collectors. However, some steps could have already been taken to streamline the present set-up and shift the emphasis from indirect to direct taxation and thus shift the burden from the lower to the upper brackets. Moreover, legislation against war profiteers and "fascist régime profiteers" has been enforced with utmost laxity. Some firms have reportedly been able to settle with a few millions Government claims running into billions of lire. And it took the spicy Brusadelli affair, last October, to "reveal" to the tax collectors the existence of that notorious and yet overlooked specimen—the Italian billionaire.

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MINISTER of Agriculture Segni (still another Christian-Democrat) prepared a few months ago a sweeping plan of land reform. Its main feature—a flat limitation on private land ownership—came immediately under fire not only from the vested interests but from many people honestly worried over the economic and social impact of such a drastic measure. No doubt, enactment of a far-reaching plan of land reform would cause, at first, a drop in agricultural production. On the other hand, a change in the present system of land tenure—besides being a matter of human and social justice—would directly contribute to the political stability of the country and would eventually result in a more economical use of the available land. The debate on the issue is still raging. The Segni Plan, possibly in a revised form, may come up before Parliament some time this summer and again it may not. In any case, the attitude of most Christian-Democrats indicates that even the often-repeated pledge to break up the large, uncultivated estates will not be honored for some time.

The Christian-Democratic majority has put up an equally successful indifference to the proddings of its allies within the Government. Although their representatives do hold some important portfolios, the Liberal and Republican parties have little influence upon the general policy of the Government because of their extreme weakness both in Parliament and in the country.

The moderate Socialists are not faring much better. Control of key economic posts by their representatives in the Government is often more nominal than real. So far, at any rate, their efforts to overhaul the economic machinery of the country and put it on a sound and rational basis have met with very limited success. Such an operation would involve the closing down of hundreds of parasitic enterprises now absorbing a good deal of the taxpayers' money and consequently an increase, at least temporary, in the number of unemployed. So, for once, management and labor agree in fighting any measure which would bring them immediate discomfort, even if such measure is obviously a necessary premise to the national recovery.

The enactment of an effective program of industrial reorganization requires the unqualified support of the Christian-Democratic leadership. But this is far from being the case. As a consequence, there is increasing pressure from the Socialist rank and file for an open break with De Gasperi. At a recent meeting of the P.S.L.I. in Milan, the leaders of the party were sharply and almost evenly divided on the issue; they all agreed, however, on one point, namely their own weakness and their inability to accomplish much whether inside or outside the Government.

Another unfavorable feature of the present

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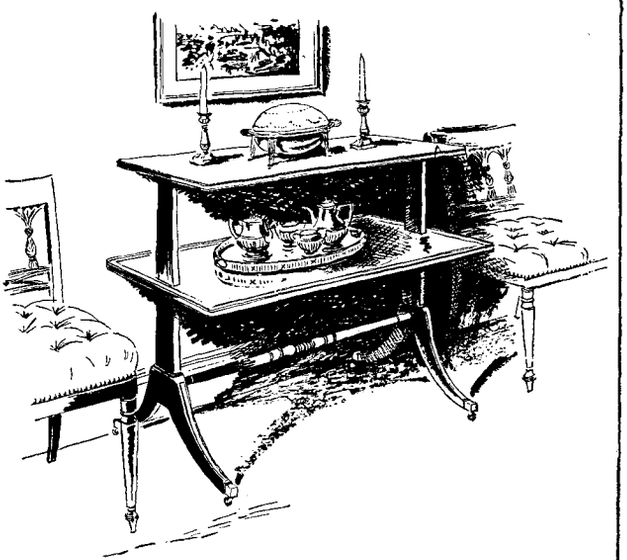

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set-up is the lack of a constructive and "loyal" opposition. In fact, monopoly of the opposition, in Parliament and in the country itself, is in the hands of the Communists. As a consequence, the latter seize upon the numerous actual and legitimate grievances against the Government and exploit them for their own purposes.

★

A MASSIVE and passive majority, its restless but powerless allies and a negative, or rather subversive, opposition: this is the line-up in Italy today. The result is political stagnation. And political stagnation is about the worst thing that may befall a country which just now has been given a chance to emerge from economic stagnation.

Fifty million ERP dollars pumped every month into the country's economy are certainly easing Italy's plight—but American help can only offer promise of limited relief unless concrete action is taken to enact long overdue economic and social reforms. To be sure, enactment of those reforms could not provide a permanent solution to Italy's chronic problem—overpopulation: the answer to that can only be large scale emigration, organized on an international basis. But without those reforms, Italy will not even outgrow the "relief" phase and will not actually enter the phase of reconstruction.

Come 1952 and the end of the ERP, Italy's economy will still be on a hand to mouth basis. And the United States—Government and taxpayers—will be confronted with an all too familiar choice: pouring into Italy more and more stopgap money or leaving that country to its own devices and possibly to a Communistic future.

Education and Wisdom

Can modern education lead to a working agreement among minds?

George N. Shuster

THE SUBJECT that this modest essay will deal with has as many branches as a tall tree. I shall treat a few of them. First of all, contemporary America fosters a great deal of scholarly inquiry, and likewise supports a tremendous educational enterprise. Our learned societies have become mass movements. Chemists meeting in conclave can fill Atlantic City to the brim. The modern languages are served by an Association of more than six thousand members, who annually produce a program of addresses so complex in character than no one can absorb more than a small part of it. Even musicology and esthetics, relatively new disciplines in this country, are already evoking so many scholarly papers and monographs that it would be difficult for hard-working specialists to evaluate what is being written. On the teaching side, the major groups of educators resemble vast and powerful unions. They have made the business of tests and measurements a big business, indeed, and when they discuss pedagogical methods they revel in a professional jargon of which the average citizen can make neither head nor tail.

Here then are two mastodons, and one cannot say that much love is lost between them. Merely to suggest to a scholar who teaches at a college or in a university that possibly the specialist in educational arts might tell him something interesting about how to give instruction is to run the risk of assassination. I have tried it. On the other hand, the American school teacher is, when measured by the norms of contemporary scholarship, endowed with what might be termed a mid-nineteenth century mentality. He doesn't see scholarly publications in his field, his general reading habits are depressing, and his genuine idealism may be coated with lavender and old lace. It seems to me that he does a better job of teaching than his university colleague (exceptions having been duly noted), but there is reason to fear that what he teaches may be thin and seriously out of date.

Much of all this is human and unavoidable. The mere thought that elementary school teachers might ask for time off in order to do research sends shivers up and down the spine, and I shall confess that I cannot think of the Harvard Graduate Faculty taking instruction in pedagogy without a chuckle. Nevertheless one will hardly escape feeling that the fragmentation of learning and education is one key to the dishevelment of the contemporary mind. If we cannot even put together what we know and what we say inside the school system, how shall we ever transfer what we know to our common life? To be sure, much of what is called research probably isn't of breath-taking importance. The world may well get on even if a dozen texts edited by the Arabic Society are never read, though one can't be too

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cocksure. But a great deal is vital, indeed. How shall we get it into our veins? The ideological naivete of the American during the past twenty years has had the most appalling consequences. That naivete seems to me to spring less from malformation of our moral and intellectual norms than from a most distressing untidiness of mind. We are like children who have been given puzzles so large that we cannot sort out the pieces.

★

I THINK it may help us to try for the nonce to stand far enough away from what we are doing to enable us to see it in perspective. It may not be necessary, though it would be desirable, to view the scene against the background of eternity. Surely it will do no harm to use a telephoto lens. I trust therefore that you will forgive my making at this point a bow in the direction of antiquity, by which I mean the culture slowly fashioned by mankind prior to the age of modern nationalism. For this present age has a character peculiarly its own. Nations as we know them have possessed great cultural vitality and initiative, but their protagonists can fairly be accused of having coated the human mind with armor plate—that is of having more or less subtly and imaginatively subjected the quest for truth to the quest for power. Almost every European nation has created a great literature, a very influential philosophy, and a noble art; but in general these things have been used, often most unwisely, for the sake of the "national culture" which produced them. While making a study of Germany's eastern boundary in the year 1930, for example, I was taken first by Germans and then by Poles to view the sites of ancient towns which, each group contended, demonstrated beyond the shadow of a doubt the identity of the "national stock" which had originally settled the region. Whether the minster of Strasbourg (or should one write Strassburg) ought to be looked upon as a French or a German masterpiece is again a problem which has whetted the appetites of many a writer.

It may be argued on the other hand that antiquity, circumscribed though it may have been by the special concerns of regions and empires, was by comparison devoted to matters of universal cultural import. The Old Testament is a book about God and the people He chose. Yet it is certainly no propagandistic essay in behalf of that people, being as much a treatise on Jewish, or human, defection from high principle as it is an account of Jewish knowledge of and obedience to the Divine Law. The Romans, for their part, lived in constant awe of the Greek minds. Catullus copied Theocritus and Vergil Homer. Yet the Greeks in their turn had un-

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flaggingly looked eastward. And of the Christian Empire which succeeded that of the Caesars, one may say that Alfred and Charlemagne foreshadowed in their efforts to foster learning the inevitability of Aquinas's restatement of the Aristotelian philosophy.

At all events, I suspect that the principal reason why we are dissatisfied with the present state of learning, as that is dispensed through what we are pleased to call "education," is this: we have now come to the place where we can see the compromises of pragmatism, in particular of nationalistic pragmatism, as clearly as a park patrol can see the vestiges of picnics on a Monday morning. We know that man has compelled truth to serve his practical purpose, and we are as a result distressed. Matters may not have been too bad while there was an Italian point of view, or an English way of doing things, or even a Russian Messianism. Now, however, with a fatefulness that would be farcical if it were not so alarming, the nations themselves have in many instances been cut up into partisan, mutually destructive bands of pragmatists, and it is apparent that "we moderns"—whoever we may be—are no longer talking the same language or going to the same places. And when the confusion of tongues becomes so loud that no one can hear what is being said, we cease, of course, to have learning or education as we desire to have them.

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ACCORDINGLY no great harm will be done by positing, for consideration if not emulation, the relative unity of antique civilization. The man of antiquity seems to have conceived of education in several ways. For one thing, he dealt with the practical arts in a quite non-academic manner. Despite the fact that the Romans were magnificent engineers who built viaducts and roads, towns and fortresses, with a skill which still earns our unstinted admiration, and despite the circumstance that such natural sciences as mathematics, physics and even chemistry were pretty far advanced in their time, it is impossible to discover traces of any school to which Roman engineers were sent. Quite as remarkable is the fact that such gifted architects as he who drew the plans for the amphitheatre of Trier apparently never earned any sort of degree. We can only conclude that the great Empire relied on a system of apprenticeship as difficult to reconstruct as it must have been efficient. On the other hand, a slight acquaintance with Cicero will indicate that the pursuit of the highest art, namely wisdom, was, though begun early in the schools of rhetoric, really the concern of men who had profited by wide experience. Cicero's greatest heir, Augustine, tells us that he

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began his quest for wisdom at the "age of nineteen," but it is not an anomaly that he really got down to it when he was a mature man. What the schools of rhetoric accomplished was to start young men on their way. It was only when some of the best among them had a chance to do what Cicero did, and settle down to the task of reconciling their experience among men with their reflections on the meaning of life, that something solid and substantial was accomplished.

Education of the formal sort, therefore, had precious little to do with the unity of antique civilization. The majority of the teachers appear to have been rather adept at starting discussion, commenting on texts and propounding scintillating theories of their own. But there seems to have been little solidarity among them. The greatest revolution which occurred in Greek educational history started when a veteran named Socrates came home from the wars. The kind of question he asked was highly disturbing to classroom routine because it was really based on a deep and vital concern with truth. He would not be put off with stock-phrases or rule-of-thumb evasions. He gave some of his fellow students an inkling of the meaning life might have for them by appealing to the moral sense, or conscience, of man. And though he ran afoul of prevailing Greek opinion, he prepared the way for Plato and Aristotle, and therewith of all those for whom Greek culture holds deep meaning today.

The unity of the ancient world, therefore, was the result of other forces than those engendered by the schools. It was based in part upon an assumed universality of religious belief, so widely taken for granted that one need hardly be surprised that attacks on dissenters were as vigorous and outrageous as those chronicled in the history of Christian persecutions. It is instructive to note that when Julian strove to reestablish the glory of ancient Rome he did not subsidize education but tried instead to revive the pagan creed. In part also unity was the result of the remarkable efficiency of governmental agencies, which relied upon services having little or no association with education. As long as these two bases of the established order remained firm, the fringes of society were guaranteed against crumbling. But when they gave way, there was nothing upon which the ancient world could any longer stand.

★

I BELIEVE, as a result of weighing this evidence with such care as I have been able to expend on it (and it is evidence which a study of the Christian Empire of Europe would reinforce), that we are making a grave error if we assume that education in our time can con-

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tribute much more than it did two thousand years ago towards effecting a working agreement among the minds of men. To be sure, the university has taken over the functions once exercised by the Roman army. Technology is not any longer the affair of apprenticeship but of the scientifically controlled laboratory. And it is also true that since this technology contributes to the well-being of the average man, one reason for confidence in the stability of the prevailing social order remains. The other traditional pillar of society, namely religious belief, has to a great extent ceased to be an effective support. Though there are millions of men and women in the Western World who still subscribe to the faiths which contributed to the building of the West, it is religious dissension rather than unity which characterizes the civilization of the present.

A number of measures have been suggested for giving to education the function of religion in the same way as the function of engineering (or science, if you will) has been entrusted to it. Some hold that our whole educational system should be asked to teach "the American way of life," and others have said that controlling the school systems of enemy or conquered peoples would constitute a contribution to world morals. Still others are of the opinion that our school system must itself acquire a set of spiritual objectives, though one cannot discern any marked agreement about the character of these objectives. I gather that there is little likelihood that even philosophy, were it limited to the quest of a social morality meaningful for the youth of our day, could be introduced without extreme difficulty.

For my part, I think that we shall have to accept education as a process limited in efficiency by tendencies implicit in its very nature. It is quite unimpeachable so long as it is concerned with quantities, as was antique engineering. Sulphuric acid simply will not be another kind of acid, regardless of what students and teachers say. But as soon as there is discussion of the qualitative, or value, aspects of life, the scene will be dominated by the kind of logic and the amount of adjudicating experience which the participants possess. Here, no doubt, a rather simple rule of thumb applies. The more highly specialized a teacher is, the smaller the area of his experience with the manifold aspects of life will probably be; and the more emotional the student is, the less probable it becomes that his logic will be above suspicion. Nevertheless, if matters proceed as they have been proceeding, the chances are that on the one hand specialization will be still more sought after, while emotionalism will be intensified by the pressure of the over-all cultural agencies of the modern world—the radio, the motion picture and the

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forum. To illustrate: every year so many thousands of books are issued by American publishers alone that a worker in a given field of inquiry can hope to read only a few of them and will as a consequence be compelled to select those which deal with subjects relatively familiar to him. Similarly it is difficult to believe that the American child, asked daily to make up his mind in a hurry about complex and vital issues by adults whose success is dependent upon ability to evoke surprise and partisanship, will learn the art of noncommittal caution.

★

I THINK that at this point we might well go back to Cicero and say that the pursuit of wisdom is not to be carried on through scholarship alone. For the delving intellectual worker must always determine how matters really stood. He is a sort of burglar seeking to decipher the combinations to the safes of the past. Assuredly he must be the most objective of mortals, who cannot dispense with impartiality even for the sake of a flash of insight. It has often been said that the weakness of scholarship is in its inability to exercise the critical faculty, for criticism in the real sense is observation, co-experience, and evaluation. Yet still more obvious is the inability of the scholar to spare time in order to release the creative faculty in himself. Should he do so he would be concerned with his own brain children and not with those of others—he would be engaged in search rather than in research. To say these things is not to belittle scholarship. For what should we do without it? But we do need to remember that criticism and creation are the progenitors of wisdom. Age need wither neither of them, though it may well alter rapture into reflection.

The real difficulty about growing older is that so many of us are not malleable. It was wittily said of Charles Beard that he went from Hegel to Marx, and from Marx to Hegel. But as least he went, if not very far. The noblest report we have about Saint Thomas is that when the *Summa* had been completed, he journeyed on to sanctity. Concerning another and lesser philosopher, Schelling, many have said that he taught several kinds of doctrine with the passing of the years. Perhaps the divagations were a little bizarre. And yet? He managed not to be a person who said the same things at seventy that he did when he was nineteen. A student of modern literature can encounter no more stimulating mind than that of Newman secure in the possession of ripe wisdom. Nor is he likely to find a more absorbing book than *Faust*.

I think that the college and the university of the future will be a place in which the limitations of education in the strict sense are recognized.

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Everybody will understand that since the business of associating youth with age so that both may learn together must reckon with the inexperience of the young man and the too narrowly channeled learning of the old. The college graduate will still have a great many unanswered questions in his notebook, and the Ph.D. will concede that familiarity with the subjunctive in Appolonius Rhodius would inspire no Sophoclean drama. If, however, both could know that the later years of notable men had been set aside for the pursuit of wisdom, what a difference it would make! We may as well dream of a new world in which anyone who desists after his fiftieth year from gainful employment, in order to devote time and energy to the task of thinking through his experience for the benefit of himself and his fellows, will be exempt from all taxes. Such men will not write a great deal. But from time to time, I trust, they may say something in which humor, caution and learning are blended with a deep concern for everlasting values. Perhaps in that blessed era one or two of them will receive honorary degrees, even though they cannot endow the university with a chair for the study of Belgian marbles and Egyptian miniatures. It may even be that someone will be signally honored for having suggested that prayer is an intellectual exercise.

Stage and Screen

The Traitor

IN THE current spate of melodrama on Broadway, I think Herman Wouk's offering is perhaps the most successful. He has developed a more authentic hero than Clifford Odets and he presents a more plausible villain than Sidney Kingsley. However, the inner logic of his piece seems to me just about as shaky as that of his fellow wrights and I honestly do not like to see confusion so "heaped" upon the beguiled spectator.

Briefly, the play's fable presents us with an old-line liberal, a university professor, who befriends and houses a brilliant young scientist working on atom projects. The time is the present. Navy Intelligence (I can't answer *why* it should be Navy), has traced a leak in atom information from the department in which our scientist works. It is coincidental that his fiancée should be not only the professor's secretary, but also the lost love of the young Lieutenant who calls to inquire in the line of duty. It then transpires that the atom man is transferring secret information to Russia; he is subsequently trapped by a Navy Captain; repents unmotivatedly; and the dénouement occurs with his displeased death, the death also of the key spy of our undeclared enemy; and the Professor's resolution to sign a loyalty test activated by the trustees of the university.

KNOX AT WORK

We think everyone, whether they enjoy, resent or question in a scholarly manner **Msgr. Knox's** translations of Holy Scripture, will have a whale of a time with this book: **TRIALS OF A TRANSLATOR** ($2). In it he explains what sort of problems he was up against, what sort of translation he was aiming at, and why. He also answers some of the more notable criticisms that have been brought against his version. The book is scholarly, yes, goes to the root of the problems involved—sure. But it is all done in an extraordinarily light and lighthearted manner: our hard-boiled proof-reader complained of being continually dissolved in mirth: need we say more?

"Unless the Lord build the house . . ."

Peter Michaels' new book **THIS PERVERSE GENERATION** ($2.75) isn't going to make anybody laugh: it is going to make plenty of us think. We all, says Peter Michaels, watch the current efforts to "build a better world" with sad smiles. We know that no building is going to be any use unless it is built according to the blueprint of the Architect of the Universe, but few of us seem very anxious to say so. Peter Michaels (like *The Commonweal)* doesn't care what he says: he tells them loud and clear. We think *Commonweal* readers will like his book.

New Spiritual Writer

WE DIE STANDING UP ($1.75) introduces **Dom Hubert van Zeller,** monk of Downside Abbey, to America. His book, he says, is "plain Gospel Christianity," written for those, who like himself, "cannot bear stuffy spiritual books." People who tend to avoid spiritual books will find they can read it with pleasure; people who have read many such books will, we believe, agree with us that the author is a new spiritual writer of importance.

Talking of spiritual writing, what did you think of **Caryll Houselander's THE PASSION OF THE INFANT CHRIST** ($1.75)? An immense amount of people are buying it, but it has had very few reviews. Perhaps it makes reviewers feel so holy they can't write. Father John S. Kennedy is a happy exception:

> "Anyone who would understand life, anyone who would truly and fully live, should read and meditate upon it."

This is the book that is trying to push past **Msgr. Knox's THE MASS IN SLOW MOTION** ($2.50) to the top of the sales list—it hasn't made it yet.

We have just brought out a new pamphlet on reading in connection with Catholic Action. It is called **LIVING THE FAITH** and comes free on request to Catherine McGill.

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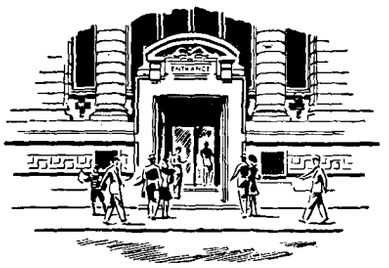

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As this works out in production, it's very exciting stuff. A geiger counter is cleverly smuggled on the stage by the Navy Captain and its incessant and cumulative rattle does an enormous amount towards increasing the play's tensions. There are also absorbing and thrilling scenes demonstrating the Navy's technical ability with recorders, dictaphones and so forth. It's true that Mr. Wouk has been forced to contrive rather awkwardly to keep the business trimmed to the one-set formula. One feels all this action would be better suited to a movie. Here, people are constantly having to exit for no apparent reason so that everyone (spy and police alike) can get a chance at the one telephone, and quite often, I must say, this looks a little silly.

However, it is with the ideology contained in the piece and with its chief character that I think Mr. Wouk's workmanship chiefly fails. His portrait of the young scientist is that of a megalomaniac who wishes to stop the "cold war" all by himself by turning over the atom to Russia. The man is no communist, his motive appears to be simply peace. But all we can learn of his character and of developments which may have brought him to this decision is that he is very brilliant and that (I'm sorry, but there it is again!) he hates his father. Most of all, we never learn what makes him change his mind and decide to betray the key Russian agent, since, after appropriate scuffles, he dies articulately convinced that his plan was the right one. This man's mistake, according to the old Professor, was "contempt for the people" and this is probably the theme Mr. Wouk meant to have paramount in the play, but somehow or other it gets lost in the shuffle and is never clearly related to treason, nor to the reasons why, in a period of "cold war," his protagonist is a traitor at all, rather than merely a psychopath whose disease is so patent it would have precluded his working at his job in the first place. No one, naturally, expects Mr. Wouk to answer the large loyalty questions occupying the world's present headlines; it is only dramatically important that he answer those questions raised inside his own play.

Following this tedious quibble, I do want to repeat that he is giving us an exciting Broadway evening.

KAPPO PHELAN.

You May Laugh

COMEDY *is a state of mind; the joke that may get* a laugh from one person may win a burp from another. Reviewed briefly below are a few movies that failed to send me into stitches, but which may at the same time amuse you at least for their money's worth. Perhaps their stars will strike a glow even if their material doesn't.

When Oscar Wilde wrote "Lady Windermere's Fan" he presented his generation with a comedy of manners sprinkled with brilliants that had to be displayed flashily within their own special showcase. The new movie made from this Wilde play, produced and directed by Otto Preminger and called "*The Fan,*" attempts to get realis-

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tic with the thin story; and the thud with which it falls is louder than the clever epigrams which were retained from the original. The material from Wilde's play is used as a lengthy flashback told by elderly Mrs. Erlynne to elderly Lord Darlington, the man who once tried to seduce her daughter. With the exception of Jeanne Crain, who was strangely cast as Lady Windermere, the actors involved handle their rôles well enough; but too much is asked of them. Madeline Carroll makes a fascinating Mrs. Erlynne; George Sanders and Richard Green are properly handsome and handy with the epigrams; and Martita Hunt leads the good supporting cast. One can't help comparing this film with the last Wilde-into-movie, and all the advantages are found in favor of last year's well-made English picture, "An Ideal Husband," in which the artificial brilliants never stopped glittering.

The new, and I believe third, movie version of *"A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court"* is also set in a flashback device. Although this was not necessary, it doesn't prove too disturbing; Mark Twain never expected us to believe his story about the early 1900 American who startled the knights and ladies of the sixth century with the magnet, watch, safety-pin and various other modern gadgets. I found the movie quite diverting, but not anywhere near as funny as it could have been. The Twain theme is full of movie possibilities and the film doesn't make the most of them. It depends mainly on Bing Crosby's casual charm and sly humor, both of which come through well. Crosby is surrounded by a good cast: William Bendix, Rhonda Fleming and several others, and I was especially delighted with Cedric Hardwicke as King Arthur who kicks up his heels with the boys. The songs are pleasant but not too plentiful. If you enjoy watching Crosby, as I do, you'll get a laugh out of this Sir Boss pulling his bag of tricks.

"Mr. Belvedere Goes to College" is another movie that depends pretty much on one man for its fun. When Clifton Webb, continuing the rôle he started in "Sitting Pretty," isn't around this sequel gets a bit soggy—particularly when it gets too involved with its silly sub-plot in which Tom Drake chases Shirley Temple who's working to get through college while supporting her baby. Of course Webb has no difficulty in doing four years of studies in one year, and in being very amusing about it at the same time. You may get tired of the pattern as this self-styled genius puts sophomores, sorority girls and professors in their respective places. His supercilious pose provides a lot of fun even though geniuses at colleges are embarrassing.

If the new movies sound too too discouraging, try an old one. *"The Wizard of Oz"* is being reissued, and it's just as much fun as it was in the first place. Your heart leaps up as Judy Garland (a youngster then) sings "Over the Rainbow" or as she goes on that exciting journey with the Cowardly Lion (Bert Lahr), the Scarecrow (Ray Bolger) and the Tin Woodman (Jack Haley). And Frank Morgan is still a whizz of a wizard. Here's a film that shows that movies *do* endure. Treat the kids—and yourself, of course.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

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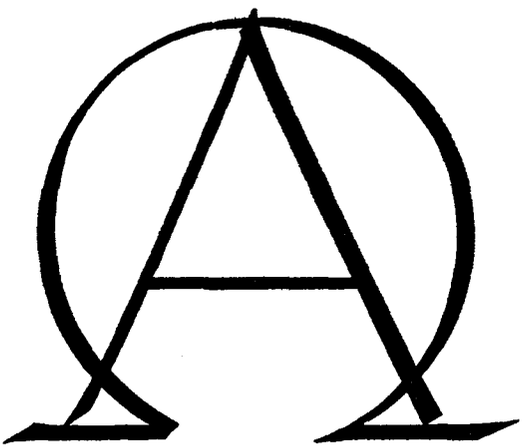
Symbols of Christ

Alpha and Omega

"Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: "I am the First, and I am the Last, and beside Me there is no God." (*Is.* 44.6)

"I am the First and the Last and the Living One. I was dead, and behold, I am living evermore." (*Apoc.* 1:18)

"Behold, I come quickly! And my reward is with me, to render to each one according to his works. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." (*Apoc.* 22:12-13)



SYMBOLS, as a rule, should not be "made"; they are, rather, "found" in the things God has presented in the great picture book of His visible creation. But a symbol representing the One Who reaches from one end of creation to the other, filling all things, cannot be found among earthly forms. God Himself gave us such a sign when He said: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, Who is and Who was and Who is coming" (*Apoc.* 1:8). The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet are chosen to denote the Lord God, Who is the First, because there is no God before Him, and the Last, because there is no God after Him. He is, therefore, the Only One Who embraces all of creation and all of human history, with Whom alone it began, and with Whom alone it will end.

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and the Omega is, therefore, the symbol of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the Eternal Love which foreordains us into adoption as sons, which reaches not only from the beginning to the end, but extends as well from the heights of Divine perfection to the abyss of human frailty. It is a universal invitation to contemplate the end in the light of the beginning, and to rest assured that "mercy first and last shall brightest shine."

DAMASUS WINZEN.

According to Borsodi

EDWARD S. SKILLIN

SOME TWENTY years ago my trade used to provide contact with the annual gatherings of the National Education Association. The organization's discussions seemed a grasshoppery sort of business. One year the nation's public school supervisors and department heads would get enmeshed in the pedagogical intricacies of presenting each subject in whopping big units (the Unit Plan). Next year they would be off in another direction—trying to make languages, mathematics, geography and the like impart "character education." In another twelve months another new tack: seeking to integrate curricula so that while the bewildered student was taking up one subject he would be imbibing all the other subjects too.

This jumping around obviously reflected the exaggerated premium Americans put on novelty and originality, the feeling that at all hazards educators must be up-to-date. In any case it went right along with the sentiment expressed at the time at Teachers College, Columbia, the dominant force in American public school education, that "everything which was taught twenty years ago (maybe the interval was much shorter) is obsolete today."

In the relentless pressure for something new, some new angle every year, American educators could have used an idea man as imaginative and prolific in persuasive plans as Ralph Borsodi. They might even have garnered a few hints from his "This Ugly Civilization" or his "Flight from the City." But the important thing now is that after eight years of labor he has produced a four-part treatise on education* that is brimming with challenging ideas. American educators could find themes for half a dozen annual meetings in the Borsodi opus if they were so inclined.

His diagnosis is cruel in its penetration. He sees most Americans proceeding merely from sensation to sensation. And it is because of "mis-education" that, despite the scientific accomplishments that produced automobiles, airplanes, the telephone, radio and modern plumbing, we tend to be "barbarians."

"Modern man in spite of modern machines, sports, athletics and sanitation is unhealthy." More than that,

**Education and Living. Ralph Borsodi. Distributed by Devin-Adair. 2 volumes, paper, $5.00; one volume, cloth, $6.50.*

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our way of life increasingly leads to neuroses, degeneration, insanity and even suicide. It is revealing that so many people want no children—either because children might interfere with their surface pleasures or would have to share in their frustrations. Something has gone wrong. One clue appears when Mr. Borsodi brightly suggests that the sort of occupational therapy which is so successful in mental institutions would be useful for us all.

Or take his comments on the cult of Progress: how it inevitably has led to fascism and communism and—in a country such as ours—the way we dismiss all critics of industrialism or of any "development in line with the trend of the day" as cranks who want the vain attempt to turn the clock back—or reactionaries. With centralization (still on the increase in the United States) goes mass production, urbanism, group action and discounting the possibilities of personal action, the shifting of more and more responsibilities to authorities and controls. In contrast, decentralization involves small-scale production, country life, personal action, dependence upon education and persuasion.

But although the somewhat familiar Borsodi objective is to get people to "free themselves from total dependence on money making" by establishing themselves and their families in "productive homes," the surprising thing about his prescription for education is his emphasis on tradition. As he sees it, the task is "not one of conditioning people so that they will be able to endure living in great metropolitan centers, but of teaching them how to substitute normal ways of living for those which are abnormal"—by turning for "guidance to the *accumulated knowledge and wisdom of mankind.*"

Or in other words, "teaching mankind how to live" by "instruction in the good, the true, the beautiful"—not by "adjusting people to the ideologies of the moment." What American education now lacks is agreement on the purpose of life. It concerns Mr. Borsodi that there are in the United States "very few individuals who still inherit a coherent and consistent tradition with regard to the major problems of life." The arbiter today is neither tradition nor education in the true sense, but "fashion."

As far as practical ends go, there is much that is persuasive in Mr. Borsodi. He believes that even for those who accept life on earth primarily as a preparation for the hereafter, his idea of the good life is basically sound. I do not follow his conception of the ideal family group: it would contain three to eight children and eight to ten adults. I suspect that here economic considerations (to the neglect of others) are uppermost in his mind.

It is only here and there in the matter of means that Mr. Borsodi falls into inconsistency. He is so insistent on tradition that he italicizes his conviction that in the past "all major problems of living [have been] faced over and over again." Yet when elements in his highly doctrinaire and concrete scheme of things flaunt the traditions of the race, it does not appear to worry him. For instance, he would resort to divorce, sterilization, contraceptives, euthanasia when expediency seemed to warrant it.

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Next Week

CHRISTIAN "PROGRESSISTES" by Robert Barrat, tells of the development of a new group of French Catholics who seek collaboration with the Communists. They wish the Church to intervene "against capitalism, liberalism, colonialism, Anglo-Saxon imperialism." They have a strange blindness as far as the evils of the Russian Communist dictatorship are concerned . . .

AFTER THE SENTENCE, by Alfred Delp. The Jesuit with whom Count von Moltke was tried and condemned to death (see The Commonweal for February 25) himself wrote some eloquent last letters: "Up to now the Lord God has helped me most magnificently and affectionately. I have not yet been terrified nor have I broken down . . ."

THE NEW LABOR LAW, by John C. Cort. As spring deepens and the 81st Congress takes no definitive action in the matter, doubts are growing whether the Taft-Hartley Act will actually be repealed or radically modified this session. Mr. Cort gives his views of the prospects.

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I think the important thing here is not to allow such inconsistencies to becloud the essential soundness of the Borsodi critique of modern urbanized life or of his general educational approach. Mr. Borsodi is most interested at the present juncture in adult re-education. He wants to set up an adult School of Living in every local community. But in "Education and Living" he has something to say to every American educator.

Books

Descent Into Hell. Charles Williams. Pellegrini and Cudahy. $2.75.

IN A MESSAGE on the paper jacket, T. S. Eliot calls the novels of Charles Williams "very good thrillers," a title, however, to which this particular one seems to have little claim; for in the general acceptance of the term, a thriller is a suspense-filled story rushing toward a breathless climax, whereas *Descent Into Hell,* in spite of a certain amount of thriller material, is a rather slow and ponderous presentation of a world in which living and dead, shadow and substance, past and present are strangely overlapped and mingled. This is not to imply that the metaphysical novel cannot be successful and even thrilling: take, for example, such varied pieces as *The Turn of the Screw,* C. S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength,* Huxley's *Ape and Essence,* and Bernanos's *Joy.* These works have a strength and vital unity variously achieved but in every case brought about through a certain mastery of the technique of the novel, a technique which I find lacking in *Descent Into Hell.* The characters for the most part remain annoyingly vague; it is too difficult to become worried over the troubles of a Pauline who remains nearly as shadowy as the other self she flees from in terror. Undeniably, the author may have something serious to convey, but he might have done it better through the medium of the poem or the essay.

The most enjoyable quality of the book is its rich, analytical (but never dramatic) prose style. If you like the neat phrase, you will be rewarded here by many a clever turn. There is even a touch of Peacockian relish in the first chapter; a promise of gentle satire that is forgotten and never fulfilled; a poet over whom you prepare for a moment to chuckle—only to find out later that he is not to be chuckled at. There are reminders of Chesterton or Beerbohm: "He knew time was beginning to hurry; he could at moments almost hear it scamper." ". . . he found an occupation for an orphan and a companion for a widow at one stroke of mercy."

There is a certain vagueness and indecisiveness also in the treatment of the theme. Ideas are stubbornly elusive. There is a good deal of talk about "a terrible good," a term which never does quite make sense. Admitting that the use of excerpts can be unfair, I offer this passage as suggestive of the tone of the plot:

> The edge of the world was running up along the sky, the world where everyone carried someone else's grief: Alice in Wonderland, sweet Alice, Alice sit by the fire, the fire burned: who sat by the fire that burned a man in another's blood on the grass of a

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poet's house, where things were given backward, and rules were against rights and rights against rules, and a ghost in the fire was a ghost in the street, and the thing that had been was the thing that was to be. . . .

All in all, this can hardly be called a significant Christian novel, although it will please those intellectuals who shy away from clarity in things spiritual and theological and would transform a mystery into a puzzle—with any number of correct solutions. Newman in his day complained that mistiness had become the mother of religion; today it is the mother of a certain amount of fiction and not a little criticism.

A. P. CAMPBELL.

The Liturgical Year. Abbot Guéranger, OSB. Vols. 4 and 5, Septuagesima and Lent. Newman Press. $4.00 ea.

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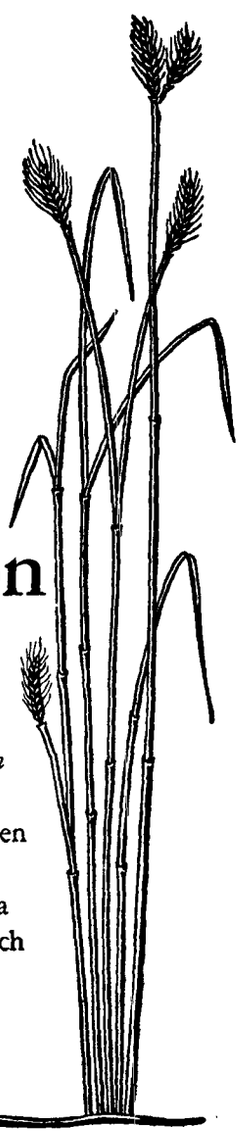

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Seeds of Contemplation is priced at $3 and published by **New Directions**, 500 Fifth Avenue, New York City, who also publish Thomas Merton's books of poetry—**A Man in the Divided Sea** ($2.50) and **Figures for an Apocalypse** ($2.50).

CONTRIBUTORS

Leo J. WOLLEMBORG is a native of Italy, now an American citizen, who served with the OWI in Europe for four years. He has lectured at Columbia University on international relations and is now a correspondent for several Italian newspapers.

George N. SHUSTER is the President of Hunter College in New York City. Formerly managing editor of THE COMMONWEAL, he is now an alternate delegate representing the United States on UNESCO.

Rev. Damasus WINZEN, O.S.B., is a monk of Maria Laach in Germany, now serving as chaplain at Regina Laudis in Connecticut. This week's is the last in a series of symbols taken from his two booklets, Symbols of Christ in the New and Old Testaments, published at Regina Laudis.

A. P. CAMPBELL teaches literature at St. Dunstan's College on Prince Edward Island. He is now on leave of absence taking graduate study at Fordham University.

Through an error in printing the April 15 issue the price of the book "Fundamentals of Logic" in the B. Herder Book Co. advertisement was given as $3.00. The correct price is $3.50.

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